

PRESS RELEASE
State Autism Commission Schedules First Hearing
to Address Autism Epidemic

State Capitol, Room 4202
September 13, 2006
9:00am to 3:00pm

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The Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism is scheduled to initiate its first of many hearings next Wednesday, September 13, 2006 beginning at 9:00 am till 3:00 pm in the State Capitol, Room 4202. The Commission will launch its inquiry into the lives of children and families devastated by autism throughout California. Once considered a rare disorder, autism is now more prevalent than childhood cancer, diabetes and Down Syndrome and most school districts in the state report a doubling in the number of students with autism in just the past four years.

The Commission was established by legislation authored by Senator Don Perata (D-Alameda) who stated that "We want to bring together some of the best and most effective minds in California to help confront the autism epidemic with short- and long-term actions the legislature and governor can take. This must be a real-time effort with real results." Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez (D-Los Angeles) has also underscored these sentiments and emphasized that, "The Autism Commission will be inclusive, diverse, and seek to include the brightest and most innovative leaders in California."

Appointed by the Senate Rules Committee and the Assembly Speaker, the Commission will submit recommendations by September of 2007 to the Governor and Legislature to close existing gaps in three state policy areas: 1) the early diagnosis and prompt treatment of autism; 2) the education of students with autism; and 3) the planning that is needed to address the "aging out" of children from California's school system into adulthood.

The September 13th hearing will include invited testimony from panels of experts on recent scientific advances in autism as well as an overview of the array of state and local programs that provide services related to autism. The Commission will also discuss its work-plan and course of action. Former Assembly Member Darrell Steinberg serves as Chair, and Dr. Barbara Firestone, President and CEO of The Help Group serves as Vice Chair of the sixteen member Commission.

Darrell Steinberg recently indicated that, "I'm looking for concrete answers. I want specific recommendations that can be implemented by future legislation to improve the lives of all individuals afflicted by the epidemic of autism. Together we will not only bring hope to families throughout the state, but we can also find solutions to help many children with behavioral and emotional challenges develop into healthy adults!"